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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001432

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: JUNE 6 PRESS REPORTS OF A TURKISH CROSS-BORDER
OPERATION INTO IRAQ: RUMOR VICE REALITY

REF: A. ANKARA 1349

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1281

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S//NF) SUMMARY: Turkish government officials, including PM Erdogan and FM Gul, publicly dismissed June 6 press reports that Turkish troops, backed by F-16s, conducted a cross-border operation (CBO) into northern Iraq against the PKK terrorist organization. Iraqi Kurdish officials echoed that denial. US personnel in several southeastern provinces reported no unusual activity or travel prohibitions, and recent imagery reports suggest that equipment movements are in line with operations conducted in southeastern Turkey in past years. However, reports by several media that Turkish military did conduct a limited hot pursuit operation on June 6 are harder to refute. Significant Turkish operations against the PKK in southeast Turkey are underway and we believe these frequently include military pursuit of PKK terrorists across the border. With PKK attacks on the rise and Turkish troop losses mounting, we expect Turkish counterterrorist operations to become more robust. Hot pursuit events, which, by their nature, are spontaneous and unplanned, are exceedingly difficult to monitor in the mountainous border terrain. A CBO, in contrast, requires advance planning and parliamentary approval, and we anticipate some, albeit short notice, advance warning. END SUMMARY.

HUNDREDS, THOUSANDS OR TENS OF THOUSANDS OF TROOPS?

[1](#)2. (S//NF) The Turkish Cihan News Agency reported on the evening of June 6 that 50,000 Turkish troops, backed by armored vehicles and combat aircraft, were targeting PKK terrorist strongholds in 11 provinces in southeastern Turkey and in northern Iraq. This report suggested that the attack followed a June 4 PKK attack in the Turkish Tunceli province, which killed 7 soldiers and wounded 6 more. A separate report characterized the operation as intended to rescue a Turkish Cobra helicopter downed in northern Iraq by PKK terrorists. However, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) had reported earlier in the day that the Cobra had been shot at and landed inside Turkish territory to check the viability of the helo, which was found to be intact, with none of its occupants injured. Subsequent press reports suggested that hundreds or up to several thousand Turkish troops had entered northern Iraq to conduct a limited hot pursuit operation and had subsequently returned to Turkey.

GOVERNMENT DENIES OPERATION

13. (S//NF) MFA Spokesman Levent Bilman told Turkish press that "there was no preparation for an operation against northern Iraq" but that Turkey was "always ready for anything." FM Gul later dismissed reports of an operation, saying "If such a thing happens, then we would announce it. We are in a war with terror, we will do whatever is necessary to fight terrorism." PM Erdogan pointed out on live television that a CBO requires a parliamentary decision. Deputy Chief of the General Staff GEN Ergin Saygun denied that there was an operation but advised us to expect continued rumors of this nature. Lower level MFA and TGS officials also denied any knowledge of any operation. If, however, the operation was hot pursuit of terrorists across the border by a few hundred troops, it is possible that TGS would not yet have received confirmation. Iraqi Kurdish sources denied to us and to FM Gul's office, that an operation had taken place.

LIMITED US VISIBILITY

14. (S//NF) US officials traveling in Diyarbakir (home to an F-16 base), Batman, Van and Sirnak saw nothing that would suggest operations beyond the scope of the ongoing Operation Sledgehammer inside of southeastern Turkey. They experienced no travel prohibitions and encountered minimal Jandarma check points. The US Liaison Officer assigned to the Turkish Special Forces unit in Silopi, just across the border with Zakho, Iraq, said the SF brigade was "business-as-usual" and denied an ongoing CBO. Recent imagery noted limited armor movement within Turkey that was not inconsistent with previous years. However, our ability to get real-time

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information on a spontaneous hot pursuit action is extremely limited. Hot pursuit is unplanned by nature and approved at the local level -- not in Ankara, and it is exceedingly difficult to confirm such an event without actually having personnel in that specific area. The Turkey-Iraq border stretches 218 miles along poorly-marked, mountainous terrain.

It is possible that Turkish units in pursuit of PKK terrorists often do not realize when they have crossed over the border. Such a crossing could be momentary or for a longer time frame but is unlikely to exceed a depth of around 5 kilometers into Iraqi territory. A cross-border operation, in contrast, is planned by TGS for execution by specific units, would likely cover a broader area, and must be approved by parliament, or at a minimum, the Cabinet. CHOD Buyukanit, DCHOD GEN Saygun and MFA officials consistently assure us that the US will be notified in advance of such a large-scale, calculated operation. However, we expect the notification time to be minimal, likely less than 24 hours of the initiation of an operation.

THE STAGE IS SET

15. (S//NF) The rhetorical tit-for-tat between TGS and the government daring each other to take the lead to green light and determine the targets for a CBO (ref a), has heightened tensions and sparked a media free for all, while still concealing their real intentions. However, almost daily PKK attacks and Turkish troop losses are building a pressure of their own. Since the May 22 suicide bombing in Ankara (ref b), terrorist violence in Turkey is clearly on the upswing. Following are only the most significant attacks:

- May 24: PKK IED killed 6 soldiers and wounded 10 in Sirnak province
- May 25: PKK IED bomb derailed a freight train in Bingol province
- May 31: PKK terrorists ambushed the Security Director's convoy in Tunceli province (no injuries)
- June 4: PKK terrorists attacked a Jandarma station in Tunceli province, killing 7 soldiers

-- June 6: PKK IED seriously wounded six soldiers in Sirnak province

COUNSELING CAUTION

¶6. (S//NF) We continue to urge the government and military leadership to take steps to lower the temperature and contain the violence. However, as Turkish military and civilian losses mount, the likelihood increases of significant Turkish action across the border into Iraq, whether through a increased number and size of locally-sanctioned hot pursuit operations or a CBO that is orchestrated from Ankara.

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